Investigating Text Talk as a Tool for Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension Skills for English Learners in Response to Intervention Groups

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INVESTIGATING TEXT TALK AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION SKILLS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION GROUPS

By Roshawn T. Sook

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in ESL

Hamline University
St. Paul, Minnesota
May 2016

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACCESS for ELLs</td>
<td>Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIMSweb</td>
<td>Academic Improvement Measurement System based on the web</td>
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<td>AMAO</td>
<td>Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives</td>
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<td>AYP</td>
<td>Annual Yearly Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBM</td>
<td>Curriculum Based Measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIBELS</td>
<td>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRA</td>
<td>Developmental Reading Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>English Learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESEA</td>
<td>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELP</td>
<td>English Language Proficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IES</td>
<td>Institute of Education Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Agency</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments</td>
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<td>MDE</td>
<td>Minnesota Department of Education</td>
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<td>NCELA</td>
<td>National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind</td>
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<td>NRCLD</td>
<td>National Research Center on Learning Disabilities</td>
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<td>NRP</td>
<td>National Reading Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>Problem Solving Team</td>
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<td>RtI</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIDA</td>
<td>World-class Instructional Design and Assessment</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

_The more you read the more things you know._

_The more you learn the more places you’ll go._ — Dr. Seuss

This quote embodies why I am so passionate about helping children excel at reading. The majority of my teaching days over the past 20 years has been spent helping children with their language and literacy skills. I know the benefits of being a good reader, and I hope to develop the skills of every child I work with. The committees I have worked on over the past 10 years are all data driven. On the Problem Solving Team (PST) we use students’ test scores to determine grade level instructional gaps and district level academic trends, and we are able to look at individual student instructional needs. Having this information enables us as a team to set district goals for curriculum and staff development, as well as to identify children who would benefit from more intensive and specific skills instruction. I want to combine what I do with what I know, and conduct research on an established supplemental literacy program to determine whether it will have the same effects with second language learners. My objective is to investigate _Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for English Learners in Response to Intervention groups._

The words a writer uses can transport you to places you have never been. These words can provide you with a very detailed picture, a visual of what the author wants you
to know. The ability to access words and their meanings gives us the ability to explore our world. As the English language teacher in a small rural Midwest town, I see a strong need to provide my students with the necessary tools to unlock the doors and open wide their access to vocabulary words and their usage so that students can explore all areas of the educational domain where English is the language of instruction.

I share the job of teaching reading in kindergarten through fourth grade with the classroom teachers and a reading specialist. I started this working partnership with the mainstream teachers in order to provide extra language support for beginning to developing level English learners (ELs). As a teaching team we determined, through data analysis of Spring and Fall assessments that students would benefit from integrating vocabulary lessons into our daily read-alouds. Read-alouds are an excellent resource for vocabulary development, because they typically contain more complex structures and a more advanced vocabulary than books primary students read at their independent reading level (Beck & McKeown, 2008). As a result of research conducted by our reading curriculum personnel and through staff development, we were introduced to Text Talk. Text Talk is a read-aloud program designed by Dr. Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (2001) to teach higher level thinking skills and sophisticated vocabulary to primary students.

Many of the books suggested by the authors of Text Talk are books we were already using in our teaching. We started to integrate Text Talk into our reading curriculum to incorporate vocabulary within the content of the trade books we read. Trade books are books made for the general public and available through booksellers;
they are not limited-edition books or textbooks. The elementary students enjoy the engaging children’s trade books used in the Text Talk lessons, but some students lack the basic vocabulary required to understand the explanations given to the higher-level target words. For example, the target word *strange* might be explained to students by saying, “When something is *strange*, it is out of the ordinary or different. It would seem *strange* if you were all calm on the playground.” Most likely this explanation would be adequate for most native English speakers; however, ELs might be left with more questions, such as “What is different? What is out of the ordinary? What is calm?” The fact that languages used to explain the target words are not often in the word banks of ELs made me question whether or not we were meeting their vocabulary needs. I also wondered how I could adapt the lessons to make them more accessible for these students.

These questions made me want to study the effectiveness of Text Talk as a method for teaching vocabulary to EL students, and to explore the impact of adapting the lessons to make them more understandable. Students who are having difficulty comprehending the stories because of a limited vocabulary are supported with additional instruction. The classroom teacher, reading specialist, and the researcher (who is an ESL teacher that teaches in a small rural community), provide this instruction. Teaching takes place during our extended reading block. During this time, I work with the EL students who need language support in vocabulary development for reading comprehension. This instruction occurs during our scheduled extended reading time, and these students receive vocabulary instruction to improve reading comprehension following our district’s Response to Intervention (RtI) model. RtI represents a systematic method for evaluating
the needs of all students, and for developing positive student outcomes through carefully selected and implemented interventions.

Researcher’s Background

As long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a teacher. My grandmother told me stories of teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. I was the oldest of five children and naturally took on a nurturing role, and throughout my school years I volunteered to read to and mentor younger students. I am drawn to students who need extra help, especially with language and reading. After earning my degree in teaching, I started my career as an elementary teacher in a rural district in the Midwest.

The school where I am employed serves students in preschool through eighth grade with approximately 210 students in attendance on a daily basis. We share many commonalities to an inner city school with the exception of size and location. Our district exceeds state averages in special needs areas with eighteen percent of our students receiving special education services. Seventy-one percent of the families who make up our school demographics live at or below the poverty level, which means a family of four in 2015 would be living on less than $24,250.00 annually. A quarter of our students, (53 of 210) are second language learners, all of whom are Spanish speakers. Forty-four percent of the children in the district are students of color. My teaching career parallels my own education at an inner city school in Minneapolis.

During my first few years teaching at this school, I had a wide range of teaching assignments. I had the opportunity to teach home economics, a second/third grade combination class, fifth grade science, sixth grade reading, and middle school literature
for students qualifying for Title I services. Title I provides federal funding to schools that have 40% or higher poverty levels. The funding is meant to help students who are at risk of falling behind academically. Supplemental instruction is provided to students who are economically disadvantaged or at risk for failing to meet state standards. Students are expected to show academic growth at a faster rate with the support of Title I instruction. Title I programs originated as the Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. It is now associated with Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act established in 2001. Its primary purpose was to ensure that all children were given the opportunity to be provided with a high quality education. I am a member of our data team. I am fascinated with assessment data and what this can tell us about a child. We can see where the child’s strengths are and exactly where they need extra instructional support. I want to make a practice of using data to inform my instruction.

In the late 1990s, there was a sudden need for English as a Second Language (ESL) licensed teachers in our area. In Southwestern Minnesota, the colleges did not offer licensure in ESL, and we had a growing immigrant population because of real job opportunities. There were no licensed ESL teachers in the region to fill at least eight openings in area schools. NCLB requires that school districts have in place highly qualified teachers, which means that teachers are licensed to teach in the area assigned. Some positions, particularly in rural areas, are difficult to fill, so the NCLB guidelines permit teachers to instruct under a variance for three years while they obtain a license. To meet the needs of these students, a grant was written in 1998 by a Southwest Service Cooperative staff member to pay for teachers in Southwestern Minnesota to pursue ESL
licensure online through Hamline University, where I enrolled to pursue the program. Upon obtaining my ESL Licensure, I was selected to teach our ESL program. I became the sixth ESL teacher in our district in six years, and the first with ESL licensure.

Role of the Researcher

Eight years ago when I began teaching ESL, I was asked to be a member of our school’s PST, as the decisions of this team impacted many of the students I work with and advocate for. During the summers, our team gathers to break down the assessment data from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in reading and math and the English language assessments that currently comprise the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs) test. The MCA reading and math assessments are taken annually by all Minnesota third through twelfth grade students. These statewide tests help districts measure student progress toward Minnesota’s academic standards and meet the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ACCESS for ELLs is an annual assessment administered to kindergarten through twelfth grade ELs in order to measure progress toward meeting Minnesota’s standards for English language development (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2015).

Our team analyzes the data from these assessments. We dissect the information by breaking it down by subgroups: all, free and reduced, second language learners, and special education; and by sub strands: a. Reading: comprehension, literature, and vocabulary; b. Math: number sense, patterns, functions and algebra, data, statistics and probability, spatial sense, geometry, and measurement; c. English Language Proficiency:
listening, speaking, reading, and writing (MDE, 2015). This is done to understand our strengths and weaknesses. The data identifies instructional gaps along with individual student needs.

Armed with this information, we are able to make plans to address instructional needs, whether across grade levels and/or student specific. The information we gather is compiled into Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations to be shared with teachers, administrators and the school board. School and administrative goals are then established based on test findings. Test scores from as far back as the 2008/2009 school year are available to the district for comparison purposes. We have been able to move in and out of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a set of measurements of schools and districts to comply with the federal NCLB act (MDE, 2015). We have also been able to lessen the achievement gap for our subgroups, especially ELs, over time. But our numbers are still too low. The past two school years we have not made AYP in reading and math. In 2015, we did not make ACCESS for ELLs targets either. The subgroups that fell below the target numbers were free and reduced, special education and Limited English Proficient (LEP), with a significant overlap within these subgroups. For example, all of our ELs are also free and reduced, and 37% of our special education students are ELs. For the purpose of this research and given my position in the school, I am concerned with the data relating to the reading sub strand in the areas of comprehension, literature and vocabulary, along with English Language Arts (ELA) standards for reading and English language development.

To address these issues, the PST received training in RtI and how to begin
implementing it. RtI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need. The practice requires the teacher to frequently monitor each student’s progress in reading or math to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals when indicated; applying child response data in making educational decisions for that student (NASDSE, 2006). One of the goals of our PST was to increase teacher knowledge of current trends in vocabulary instruction for all students, but specifically for our ELs. Academic vocabulary instruction was addressed in all grades, with emphasis placed in content areas. Workshops were provided on teaching academic vocabulary, and staff was required to read the book *Building Academic Vocabulary* (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). It is because of my work on this solution seeking team, my training on the RtI model, and my work with ELs that I became interested in investigating vocabulary strategies that support reading comprehension.

**History of Response to Intervention**

The NCLB of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 have brought children’s education and data driven decision making to the forefront of virtually all educational institutions. RtI, a federal initiative, came out of the reauthorization of IDEA. Policymakers have high hopes that RtI will encourage and guide practitioners to intervene earlier on behalf of a greater number of children at risk for school failure (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

RtI is a tiered approach to service delivery that is implemented school wide. In its essence, RtI is about progress monitoring and data-driven decision-making. While frequently monitoring student progress and differentiating instruction as needed,
educators are able to more easily identify students at risk for failure or students struggling with regular education. RtI models help schools lessen the number of students referred to special education services by creating a model with an emphasis on differentiating learning for and meeting the needs of all students (NRCLD, 2006).

One fundamental principle of this model is an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven effective, especially in the area of reading instruction. The intent of RtI is to reduce the number of students who are classified as children with learning disabilities. Reasoning for the RtI initiative is to conduct research on the effects of early intervention with beginning readers. It will help improve programming if certain methods are determined to be more successful than others. Thus, early intervention, monitoring progress, and targeting specific skills may help to prevent ELs and others from being improperly classified as learning disabled.

While the research supporting RtI has been considerable in the past decade, there is less information available as to specific instructional strategies that support ELs. In addition, ELs need time and effective instruction to develop language skills that allow them to become proficient readers, writers and speakers of English. Thus, there is a need for further research regarding explicit teaching strategies and interventions specifically for children who are learning English and also learning to read in a language that is not their native language.

Response to Intervention Model

RtI is defined as the change in performance as a function of an intervention (Gresham, 1991). The RtI model is a multi-tiered approach to providing services and
interventions to all students at increasing levels of intensity based on progress monitoring and data analysis. Rate of progress over time is used to make important educational decisions, including possible determination of eligibility for specialized education services. Although the instruction and interventions included in the RtI model may involve many different levels of intensity and individualization, they are usually considered to fall within three tiers. Tier 1 interventions consist of a general education program based on evidence-based practices. Tier 2 interventions involve more intensive, relatively short-term interventions, and Tier 3 interventions are long-term and may lead to special education services. RtI represents a systematic method for evaluating the needs of all students and for fostering positive student outcomes through carefully selected and implemented interventions.

The process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, while monitoring student progress and adjusting instruction based on the student’s response, requires the use of curriculum-based measures (CBM) in fluency and comprehension. CBMs establish benchmarks for student achievement and educational progress through direct assessment of their academic skills (Bender & Shores, 2007). CBMs can be used to measure basic skills in reading, mathematics, spelling, and written expression. When using CBMs, the teacher gives the student brief timed samples of academic material taken from the child's school curriculum. The child's performance on a CBM probe is scored for speed or fluency and for accuracy of performance. The results are then charted to offer the instructor and others a visual record of the child's rate of academic progress. Each student is compared
to his or her own prior performance. Since CBM probes are quick to administer and simple to score, they can be given repeatedly; this allows for constant adjustment of instruction based on student response (Bender et al., 2007).

Educational Expectations for English Language Learners

The reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the NCLB, 2001 inaugurated major changes in the expectations placed on state and local education agencies regarding assessment of and accountability for LEP students—also known as ELs. Specifically, NCLB Title III requires states to:

- Establish English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards aligned to state academic content standards, yet suitable for EL students learning ESL (NCLB, 2001). The state of Minnesota adopted and released ELP standards that are linked to the content area standards in English language arts, math and science in July 2003. Minnesota joined the WIDA consortium beginning in the 2011/2012 school year and has adopted the WIDA ELP standards. Currently, there are 35 states that have adopted these standards since their inception in 2003.

- Annually assess the ELP of each EL student using a valid and reliable assessment of ELP aligned to LEP standards (NCLB, 2001). Our state and district will use ACCESS for ELLs, which is an assessment designed by the WIDA consortium.

- Define AMAO as a part of the effort to comply with the Title III section of NCLB to measure and report on progress toward and attainment of English proficiency and academic achievement standards (NCLB, 2001). The school district where the research is being conducted is a member of a Title III Consortium. There are
seven district members with 15 schools being serviced by eight ESL teachers. Title III dollars are allocated to school districts to supplement their English language programs. To qualify for this money, districts need to enroll over 100 LEP students. Districts that do not generate these numbers may join together with other districts to combine and form a consortium to access these funds.

- Hold local education agencies (LEAs) accountable for meeting increasing AMAO targets for ELP over time (NCLB 2002, Public Law 107–110, 115 Statute 1425).

A local education agency (LEA) is a government agency that supervises the instruction of or educational services to members of the community. People also use the term school district to refer to a local education agency (Department of Public Education) http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/ellamao.html. The Title III Consortium and district of this study’s assessment scores have previously been placed in AMAO status that is in need of improvement implementation; this level indicates that the consortium and/or district has not made AMAO for three years in a row and must notify parents and update their AMAO improvement plan. In 2007/2008, 2008/2009, and 2009/2010, the school district and the Title III Consortium of this study did not attain passing AMAO scores in math and reading, more specifically in the sub-strands of vocabulary and literature. In the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 school years we made AMAO thresholds and the past three years we are again missing the designated targets.

The new WIDA standards, our district and consortium assessment scores, and our AMAO status indicate areas of concern and the need to identify specific methods of
instruction that will support student learning and improve language and academic attainment. I am involved in designing the RtI instructional model in our district and the AMAO improvement plan for the Title III Consortium, and will be working with ELs within this system. It is my goal through research to determine effective vocabulary interventions and instructional strategies that support both language learning and reading comprehension. My purpose for doing this is to improve my instructional practices and student learning, and to share my findings with my peers, both mainstream and ESL.

Beneficiaries of Research

It is through my involvement on our district’s data team and my work on the Title III consortium’s AMAO improvement plan that I have gained knowledge on how to use data to improve instruction. Our data indicates a need to improve vocabulary skills for all students, but specifically for our second language learners. Over the course of the last few years I have had the opportunity to share our data findings with my coworkers, consortium members and our school administration.

Just as Title I monies are tied to MCA proficiency scores and called AYP, Title III monies are tied to ACCESS for ELLs proficiency scores and are called AMAO. This past year our consortium did not meet proficiency in AMAO 3: Academic Achievement and Success. We were required to notify parents and to write a program improvement plan. One of the goals for improvement included teacher training and participation in each member district’s RtI team. All districts determined that their EL students needed support in vocabulary and comprehension. ESL district members researched reading strategies and interventions that would support ELs. It was through these studies and
discussions that *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan came to our attention. The rationale for robust vocabulary instruction is that vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency in particular and school achievement in general (Beck et al., 2002).

All members of the Title III consortium are in the process of implementing RtI in their respective schools, and each member was also a member of the RtI team to represent their EL population. Most of us work with primary students and are teaching an RtI intervention group during grade level extended reading period. Intervention groups vary according to student need, but each of us has at one time taught a vocabulary intervention group to support student reading comprehension. We all know that vocabulary plays a key role in people’s lives and their future possibilities. The problems that both teachers and students face are the profound differences in vocabulary knowledge among learners. These various needs necessitate accommodations by the teacher. *Bringing Words To Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* provides examples of instruction that offer rich information about words and their uses, it provides frequent and varied opportunities for students to think about and use words, and enhance students’ language and comprehension. We wondered if the strategies that Beck et al. proposed for whole group vocabulary instruction would work well in our small vocabulary intervention groups and what accommodations would be needed for EL students. We believed that good instructional practices should work in a variety of settings, but the research to support this specific model was hard to find, and it became the force behind my interest in this research.
Guiding Research Questions

A considerable amount of evidence suggests that approaches involving early intervention, ongoing progress monitoring, and effective classroom instruction consistent with RtI are associated with improved outcomes for the majority of students in early reading and math (Burns, Griffiths, Parson, Tilly, & VanDerHayden, 2007; Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007; Haager, Klingner, & Vaughn, 2007; McCardle & Chabra, 2004). Considerably less information exists, however, about the effectiveness of these approaches with a growing population of students: ELs at risk for reading problems (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). Educators must consider a student’s language proficiency in English and their native language when implementing the RtI model with ELs. A significant challenge is determining a student’s knowledge and skills in their first language and then understanding their performance in English. For example, there are subgroups of students whose literacy knowledge and skills in their first language (e.g., Spanish) are adequate, but whose literacy skills in English are below average. These students have demonstrated the capacity to acquire reading skills and now require instruction so they can apply those skills to the acquisition of English literacy. Other students may have low literacy in both first language and English because they have not received adequate instruction in either language (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2010). Students in the ESL program in my district do not receive native language instruction; they receive language and academic instruction from both the classroom and ESL teacher, and may also receive support from a reading specialist or Title I teacher.

It should be noted that although there are many considerations involved in
decision making about screening, assessment, and intervention for ELs, educators should not postpone decision making until a better knowledge base is available. Teachers are eager to make decisions that will be associated with improved outcomes and early identification and intervention for those who need it. They must proceed with the most effective practices possible for ELs, and as new research evidence becomes available, changes to programming should be considered (Vaughn & Ortiz, 2010).

My research goal is to investigate Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups. I plan to determine if Text Talk instruction will improve vocabulary and increase reading comprehension for EL students. I want to know what, if any, adaptations are necessary to apply to Text Talk that support language learning while aiding vocabulary development and increasing comprehension for the students. These guiding questions will provide the foundation for my research in the first through third grade RtI reading intervention groups that I work with. My hope is that the answers to these questions will provide insights for researchers and teachers about the effectiveness of the strategies suggested by Beck et al. as a method for teaching vocabulary and improving comprehension for EL students through the use of common trade books.

Summary

The RtI model is a federally mandated program being implemented in schools nationwide. RtI has a track record for successfully improving students’ academic skills by differentiating instruction, matching interventions to a student’s needs, progress monitoring, data–based decision making, and providing ongoing teacher development
using research based studies. ELs respond to instruction designed to meet their individual 
language and conceptual needs. Research on interventions for ELs has had positive 
outcomes when instructors teach new skills explicitly and intensely, with language 
modifications for general classroom reading instruction.

Of the many reasons for providing students with instruction to build vocabulary, 
none is more important than the contribution of vocabulary knowledge to reading 
comprehension. One of the most important findings in reading research is the extent to 
which students’ vocabulary knowledge relates to their reading comprehension (August, 
2004; Baumann, Kame‘enui, & Ash, 2003; & NRP, 2000). Given that students’ success 
in school and beyond depends greatly on their ability to read with comprehension, it is 
pressing that we provide instruction that equips students with the skills and strategies 
necessary for lifelong vocabulary development. The next step for me is to establish 
proven instructional strategies that will be effective tools to use with ELs who need 
vocabulary and language support for reading comprehension within the RtI program 
model.

Chapter Overviews

The United States has experienced a large growth in the number of ELs over the 
past decades, expanding the need in most public schools to provide English language 
instruction. From the 1997-98 School Year to the 2008-09 School Year, the number of 
ELs enrolled in public schools increased by 51% (NCELA, 2011). During the same 
period, the general population of students grew by 7.2 percent. These numbers of ELs 
pose unique challenges for educators striving to ensure that such students get access to
the core curriculum in schools, and acquire academic knowledge and English language skills. In my state, Title III consortium, and school district, we are failing to meet the needs of our EL population, according to nationwide test scores in both reading and math. For me, addressing the student’s language needs and reading skills would impact success in all educational domains. I have reported the outcomes of our test scores by content areas and subgroups and determined that as a district we need to improve instruction for EL students in reading, and specifically vocabulary, to support reading comprehension. I have also reported the implementation of the RtI model in our district and propose to do research on proven vocabulary instructional strategies designed by Beck et al. for native English speakers. My intention is to Investigate Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for English Learners in Response to Intervention groups. I want to know if these strategies, and/or adaptations to them, will prove effective with first through third grade ELs in RtI groups using Text Talk instruction to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension.

In Chapter One, I introduced my research by establishing the purpose, significance and need for the study. I briefly introduced the context of the study and the background and role of the researcher.

In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the literature relevant to the importance of vocabulary development and reading comprehension and the impact of vocabulary instruction for ELs. I discuss the scope of robust vocabulary instruction by Beck et al. and its implications for EL students. I report on the implementation of the RtI model and the need to find effective vocabulary interventions to use with ELs to support reading
comprehension. I investigate the success of using a variety of rich and intensive vocabulary interventions designed by the authors *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* to improve vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups.

In Chapter Three, I present the context and participants of the study. Chapter Three also includes a description of the research design and the methodology that I used to answer my research question. Chapter Four examines the results of this action research project. Chapter Five contains my reflections, discusses the implications and limitations of this study, and offers recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter Two, I present previously investigated research regarding Robust Vocabulary Instruction for improving vocabulary and reading comprehension for ELs. I begin with what research says is effective instructional methods for teaching vocabulary and the importance of developing vocabulary for reading comprehension and fluency. I examined studies of how vocabulary instruction improved the vocabulary skills of native English speakers and ELs. A discussion about Robust Vocabulary Instruction designed by Beck, McKeown & Kucan, is presented. Finally, I look specifically at the RtI model and the benefits of using small group instruction to support ELs who need additional instructional support for vocabulary and comprehension skills.

One of the roles of teachers is to make good instructional decisions using evidence from both exemplary practice and research. One area of importance to the curriculum is vocabulary, and some of the oldest findings in education research are the strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Tannenbaum, Torgesen, & Wagner, 2006). The connection between vocabulary and reading comprehension, as well as vocabulary and school performance in all content areas, has been established in educational research (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Perfetti, 1983; National Reading Panel, 2000). According to Stahl (1999), the importance of vocabulary knowledge for reading comprehension should be self-evident to anyone
who has ever read a jargon-filled text, then scratched his or her head and wondered what he or she had just read. Word meaning enables a person to comprehend a text containing those words. Vocabulary knowledge has a significant influence on decoding and comprehension performance (Gregg, Coleman, Davis, & Chalk, 2007). There are roughly 88,700 word families used in books up to the 12th grade (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). About half the texts we read consist of 107 of the most common words. Another 5,000 words account for the next 45%, so that 95% of the texts read consist of about 5,100 different words (Adams, 1990). The rest of the texts read consist of the remaining 83,000 or so words (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). With these statistics in mind, there is no disputing that the pressure on educators to improve students’ vocabulary knowledge in order to improve reading comprehension has increased.

Research clearly indicates that vocabulary knowledge is highly correlated with overall reading achievement (NRP, 2000). In addition to affecting reading performance, vocabulary knowledge affects a student’s ability to participate fully in both social and academic classroom routines. In this regard, all students can benefit from vocabulary instruction, especially if that instruction is tailored to individual strengths and needs. In the areas of reading and language arts, vocabulary instruction is critical to the improvement of comprehension (Blachowicz, Fisher & Watts-Taffe, 2005).

Given the importance of vocabulary knowledge to learning, word knowledge disparities among children have long been a research concern (Becker, 1977; Graves, Brunetti, & Slater, 1982; Hart & Risley, 1995). The average child enters kindergarten with approximately 5,000 words in his or her meaning vocabulary. Too many children
enter school with far fewer words, thus beginning their school careers at a disadvantage. One factor that impacts vocabulary knowledge is second language acquisition. Research indicates that one of the biggest factors influencing the discrepancy between the reading performance of native English speakers and that of ELs is English language vocabulary knowledge, despite the fact that many of these language learners possess a large vocabulary in their native language (Garcia, 1991; Goldenberg, Rezaei, & Fletcher, 2005). Growth in vocabulary knowledge occurs rapidly and effortlessly in some children; however, many children with reading problems have poor vocabularies, and the gap between the vocabulary they need and the one they have widens over time. In an effort to improve the literacy of the nation’s children, the improvement of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is necessary (Biemiller, 1999).

Fortunately, the report of the NRP (2000) supports the notion that vocabulary instruction appropriate to the age and ability of the student leads to gains in comprehension. These findings hold across grade levels, beginning as early as preschool, and apply to both native English speakers and those learning English as a second language (Collins, 2005). As students improve their vocabulary knowledge, they also improve their reading comprehension (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Knowledge of word meanings and the ability to access that knowledge efficiently are recognized as important factors in reading and listening comprehension, especially as students progress to middle school and beyond (Chall, 1983). Weaker vocabularies cause students’ comprehension to suffer, and difficulties in comprehension cause their vocabularies to remain weak (Chall, 1983). The goal of this researcher is to investigate Text Talk as a tool for improving
vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups.

Synthesis of Literature

Vocabulary Development in the Primary Grades

Scott and Nagy (1997) report that a child must be able to understand the meaning of 90 to 95% of the words in a text to fully comprehend the content. Therefore, the need for students to develop their vocabulary in order to be fluent readers is crucial (Stahl, 1999). The rate at which word meanings are acquired can vary greatly. When considering everything involved in learning the meaning of a word, and the sheer volume of words students need to know, it is not surprising that students’ vocabularies develop through a variety of activities; they learn words when others such as parents, peers and teachers explicitly tell them word meanings; they learn words from the contexts of what they read, hear, see, and experience in their lives; and they learn words by strategically figuring them out based on the context, their knowledge of word parts, and their ability to use resources such as a dictionary. Because there are so many ways in which students acquire word knowledge, and because acquisition occurs over time, both teaching and development are important parts of a vocabulary program.

The NRP’s findings on vocabulary yielded several specific implications for teaching reading. First, vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly. Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are necessary. Second, learning in rich contexts, incidental learning, and use of computer technology all enhance the acquisition of vocabulary. Third, direct instruction should include task restructuring as necessary and should actively engage the student. Fourth, dependence on a single
vocabulary instruction method will not result in optimal learning. Finally, the most effective approaches utilize multiple methods of instruction.

In a study by Nelson and Stage (2007), research was conducted to assess the effects of contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction on vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Nelson et al. concluded that students who received contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction showed significant gains in their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Moreover, in another study, lower-skilled students showed the largest gains in their vocabulary improvement (Fukkink & de Glopper, 1998). The multiple meaning vocabulary instruction is designed to enhance students’ awareness of the complexity of words.

In a study by Kucan, Trathen, & Straits (2007), developing rich representations of word meanings and learning how words work were emphasized as two aspects of effective vocabulary instruction. Effective vocabulary instruction involves opportunities for students to have multiple encounters with words in a variety of contexts (Beck & McKeown, 2002). Teachers can use specific activities to support students in developing rich representations of word meanings that exceed merely associating a word with its definition. Kucan et al. (2007) suggest that inviting students to develop multiple representations as well as multiple connections are important ways to mediate students’ developing representations of word meanings. Kucan et al. (2007) also suggest students learn about how words work. Teachers are encouraged to focus their instruction on word features such as prefixes, roots, and word histories. The Kucan et al. (2007) study shows strong relationships between vocabulary improvement and reading comprehension.
The NRP reports that explicit instruction and incidental learning are integral pieces of a sound vocabulary program and the following guidelines are the teacher’s responsibility to address:

- Teaching specific vocabulary to students through explicit instruction and use of new words.
- Teaching independent strategies that students can use to unlock the meanings of words through instruction in strategy content (e.g., affixes, context, and references) and processes.
- Differentiating instruction based on the needs of ELs, emergent readers, and the opportunities afforded by technology.
- Developing vocabulary by structuring an environment that builds word awareness through play, the availability of good books to encourage wide reading, and teacher modeling of word interest (NRP, 2000).

Much is known about the importance of vocabulary knowledge to success in reading; when the reader understands the vocabulary, comprehension improves. However, there is limited research on the best methods or combinations of methods of vocabulary instruction and the measurement of vocabulary growth and its relation to instruction methods. This is especially true for second language learners. It is imperative that teachers help students develop strategies for independent word learning and support them in becoming aware of when and how to implement these strategies in self-selected situations. The above guidelines provide support for using a multidimensional vocabulary program to help improve the vocabulary learning of students, especially ELs.
Vocabulary Development for English Learners

The increasing number of ELs in our schools, along with the established importance of vocabulary to comprehension, suggest the need for an intensive research focus on which instructional methods are most effective with EL students. Until recently, however, there have been few experimental vocabulary interventions with school age students who are learning to speak English at the same time they are learning to read. The recent report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth and the initiation of vocabulary interventions by researchers such as Calderón et al., 2005 & Carlo et al., 2004, report that this situation is beginning to change.

Recent studies of ELs showed that vocabulary instruction significantly improved vocabulary skills and reading comprehension over time. In studies conducted in three schools with 254 students over a 15-week period, ELs and native English students increased their scores on vocabulary assessments equally when using strategies developed by Beck et al., 2002. These studies showed that improvement in vocabulary had a direct impact on reading comprehension for both groups of students (Carlo et al., 2004). Precise vocabulary instruction is a support to bridging the language gap for ELs. ELs come to the classroom with limited vocabulary in English. Even after they have developed a strong base of English language and vocabulary, many students fall behind due to a lack of academic language in core content. The gap widens with time, as native English speakers are exposed to rich vocabulary, while ELs are instructed using simplified language rather than the more sophisticated language needed for academic
success (Cummins, 2003).

Recent research indicates that ELs require instruction in both basic vocabulary words and more sophisticated words. Basic words in the realm of academic language might include *book, page, paper,* and *word.* Sophisticated words that a teacher might use as part of his or her instruction could include; *summary, evaluate, literature* and *discussion.* Although it may be tempting to keep vocabulary instruction for ELs at the basic level, EL students, like all others in the class, need and will benefit from rich instruction in sophisticated words (August, 2005; Collins, 2005). Rich instruction for EL students includes the same components relevant to native language speakers: definitional, contextual, and usage information. Like native speakers, EL students need opportunities to actively engage with new words through acting out, talking with others, or answering engaging questions such as: Can rock climbing be *dangerous?* As with all students, concrete words are more easily learned than are abstract words. Thematic approaches in which the development of concepts is a part of the instruction are useful. Figurative language and idiomatic expressions are difficult for EL students and should be taught explicitly (Blachowicz, Fisher, & Watts–Taffe, 2005).

Precisely what constitutes effective vocabulary instruction for ELs is not well understood according to Goldenburg (2006), but there is little doubt that explicit attention to vocabulary instruction of everyday words as well as more specialized academic words should be part of EL’s school programs. Teaching specific terms in a specific way is probably the strongest action a teacher can take to ensure that students have the academic background knowledge they need to understand the content they will encounter in school
Marzano & Pickering go on to say that a person’s knowledge of a topic is rooted in the terms they know relevant to the topic. The more a student understands the terms, the easier it is for them to understand what they read or hear about a given subject. As an ESL teacher, it is my goal to provide my students with the tools needed to aid in understanding unknown vocabulary. It is my hopes through researching a variety of strategies that I can identify specific ones that will prove effective tools to support comprehension through vocabulary attainment for EL students.

### Robust Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary is a central element in language development programs for ELs (Nation, 2001; Meltzer & Hamman, 2005; Cummins, 2000; & Scarcella, 2002). These researchers say that a developed vocabulary is key to academic success. Students have to understand vocabulary to comprehend the academic content they encounter in school. Stahl et al. (1986) revealed that when specific vocabulary from academic subject areas is selected as the focus of instruction, the result was a 33% increase in vocabulary comprehension. Therefore, it appears when students are taught specific content vocabulary in each subject area at each grade level, students have an excellent opportunity to acquire the academic background knowledge they need to understand the subject area content. One widely used system for determining which words to teach is a framework that organizes vocabulary terms into three tiers (Beck et al., 2002). Beck et al. describe robust instruction as instruction that: offers rich information about words and their uses, provides frequent and varied opportunities for students to think about and use words, and enhances students language comprehension and production. This system
provides a starting point for vocabulary organization.

Beck et al. (2002) stress that even though there are many words to learn, not all words call for attention. They identify three tiers of words in our vocabulary.

- Tier 1 words are common words that everyone should know and are heard in everyday speech. Some examples are concrete nouns and verbs: *book*, *cold*, and *dog*. They are words learned early on by all children.

- Tier 2 words cross subject areas and are frequently used in writing and speech. These are the words that must be specifically taught. Some examples are: *autumn*, *commotion*, and *curious*. Tier 2 words help students to access Tier 3 words.

- Tier 3 is comprised of words from specialty domains; these words are often learned on an as needed basis. Some examples are: *amoeba*, *procrastinate*, *antique* and *molten*.

The authors focus on the teaching of Tier 2 words. Beck et al. (2002) suggest using a systematic approach to teach Tier 2 words because there are so many, and because they cross different content areas and are the words mature language users employ in their daily lives.

This research reports that teaching an average of 400 words per year would make a tremendous difference in a student’s vocabulary and text comprehension skills. With explicit instruction of Tier 2 words, students can make information more comprehensible. The more words a student understands in a text, the more meaning gained from it. Robust Vocabulary Instruction offers rich information about words and their usage and provides a variety of opportunities for learners to think about and use words that enhance language
production and comprehension. For ELs to understand what they read, they need a vast understanding of words. It is through multiple opportunities to think about and use words that students gain this depth of understanding (Beck et al., 2002).

The findings of Beck et al. (2002) are aimed at native speakers, but they maintain that their strategies work well with all learners. These researchers are leaders in the field of Robust Vocabulary Instruction who believe that integration and meaningful use are essential for understanding. Some educators assert that vocabulary development should focus on learning words in context. Context clues are hints to the meaning of a word that are contained in the text and illustrations that surround it. Context clues can include definitions, examples, and restatements; as well as charts, pictures, and type features (glyphs, fonts and spacing). In one study, middle school students who were taught to identify and use specific types of both linguistic information (words, phrases, sentences) and nonlinguistic information (illustrations and typographic features) were then able to use this information to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words in texts (Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik, & Kame´eenui, 2003). Additionally, students need multiple exposures to words before they become ingrained.

Early vocabulary learning for students takes place orally and then progresses to the written word and wide reading. This is a natural progression, and is necessary for students to experience a vast number of unfamiliar words. Beck et al. (2002) also recognize that wide reading is important, but report that students who find reading difficult do not successfully derive meaning from words as well as other students. Because these students find reading challenging, they do not read widely. Thus,
vocabulary acquisition through wide reading is not a useful approach for these students. Beck et al. (2002) maintain, therefore, that in wide reading, contexts are not sufficient for learning word meaning. They suggest that struggling readers often are not successful at vocabulary growth through wide reading. If students cannot decode or infer a word from context, their reading is generally not productive. Consequently, wide reading leaves struggling readers with a vocabulary deficit.

Good teachers help their students access new information by building background knowledge and providing ways for students to understand unknown words in a given text (Marzano, 2004). Beck et al. (2002) discourage looking up words in the dictionary. They believe it is more important to explain a word’s meaning than to define it. They suggest giving a student-friendly definition of the word and a focused concept of what the word means in the text currently being used. In addition, any words used in explaining the word must also be understandable to the learner.

Teaching content vocabulary using a systematic approach appears to be a powerful tool for student success (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). Furthermore, research firmly documents that academic background knowledge has an effect on academic achievement. Any intervention for the achievement of students should identify increasing students’ content vocabulary knowledge through direct instruction as a leading priority (Marzano, 2004). Word-learning strategies include building background, predicting, inferring, learning how to use reference aids, using graphic organizers, note taking, finding patterns, classifying, and using realia and imagery. Word-learning strategies are important for ELs and native English speakers as reported by Carlo, August, and Snow.
Beck et al.’s (2002) robust vocabulary instruction does not address the specifics of how this method will benefit ELs. There is no mention of second language learners in their 2002 book. However, Beck et al.’s publication of *Creating Robust Vocabulary: Frequently Asked Questions & Extended Examples* in 2008 responds to the following question. When asked what kind of instructional methods are needed for ELs, Beck et al. (2008) reply that until recently there has been very little research on vocabulary instruction for students learning English. Subsequently, there is nothing in the research to suggest that what works with first-language learners does not work with second-language learners. This is also supported by the National Literacy Panel’s preliminary results (August, 2004), which indicate that whereas some differences between the two groups exist, the methods that benefit first-language learners also help second-language learners. They go on to report that some prominent researchers addressed these same concerns and emphasize that there is a strong correlation between vocabulary and comprehension for ELs.

Only a handful of experimental studies have been conducted since 1980 examining the effectiveness of interventions in building vocabulary for students learning English as a second language. The findings indicate that research-based strategies effective with native English speakers are also effective with second language learners. Strategies must accommodate and be adjusted to meet the strengths and needs of these students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Calderon et al., 2005). So then, what makes robust vocabulary instruction effective for all students, ELs and native speakers alike? Robust
vocabulary instruction offers students the opportunity to view words in multiple contexts and have repeated opportunities to use and think about the words.

**Response to Intervention**

RtI is an instructional service delivery model founded on two key premises: All children can learn when provided with appropriate, effective instruction. Moreover, most academic difficulties can be prevented with early identification of need followed by immediate intervention.

RtI is an educational model designed to increase the opportunity for all students to meet academic achievement standards through early identification of students whose academic needs place them at risk. RtI ensures that resources and interventions are appropriately targeted to serve all struggling learners as early as possible through high quality instruction. The RtI process provides a vehicle for all teachers: general, ESL, Title I and Special Education, to share responsibility and work collaboratively in a supportive environment to ensure that student learning is met with success.

RtI focuses on early intervention in a child’s education through a multi-tiered approach where each tier provides interventions of increasing intensity. It includes the screening of all children early in their education to identify those who are not responding to classroom instruction and to provide support through the use of research-based interventions at each tier while monitoring progress frequently (Batsche et al., 2005).

**Tier 1**

Tier 1 Instruction occurs in general education classes and is intended for all students. Its major functions are to enhance all students' academic learning outcomes
(Batsche et al., 2005) and to prevent students from developing reading skill deficits (Grimes & Kurns, 2003). Tier 1 reading instruction gives students access to grade-level core curriculum; its instructional emphases encompass all the grade-level literacy skills as defined by the ELA standards designed by each state’s Department of Education (Grimes et al, 2003; Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004). Research-based core reading curriculum used in Tier 1 instruction should align core content with grade-level benchmarks established by each state’s educational governing agency (Simmons & Kame'enui, 2006). This instruction emphasizes the five key components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NRP, 2000).

Classroom instructors judge the quality of their Tier 1 Instruction by how the groups of students respond to the provided instruction. Tier 1 is designed to meet the needs of a majority of the school population and includes the following components: a research-based core reading program, benchmark testing of students at least three times a year to determine their instructional needs, and professional development to provide teachers with the tools necessary for teaching reading effectively.

In Tier 1, the classroom teacher delivers to all students core instruction in the five components essential to early reading: phonemic awareness, phonics and word study, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. In schools, benchmark assessments are administered at designated times throughout the school year. The purpose of the benchmark assessment is to provide information that can be used to guide instruction and to measure student mastery of standards targeted for instruction (Stecker, P., & Fuchs, L.,
2000). Common benchmarks used are: DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) which is a series of short tests that assess early childhood (K-6) literacy, AIMSweb (Academic Improvement Measurement System based on the web), a web-based data management and reporting system used to determine response to intervention, and CBM. CBMs for example, allow teachers to monitor student progress and, in response to testing results, differentiate instruction for students who do not meet grade-level expectations. Teachers ensure that small groups of students receive targeted skills instruction through the use of flexible grouping arrangements in the classroom. To be deemed effective, Tier 1 instruction alone should meet the instructional needs and grade-level expectations of approximately 80% of students without additional instructional support (Foorman & Moats, 2004; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Simmons & Kame'enui, 2006). It is also necessary to consider the language development and cultural aspects of our EL students when planning instruction and evaluating achievement, for it to be effective and appropriate for these students. Professional development opportunities that highlight key components of teaching EL students in the general education classrooms are also needed.

In Tier 1, once instruction is adjusted to meet each student’s individual needs, progress is monitored and decisions are made as to whether students are meeting predetermined benchmarks. If the student does not make the targeted gains after instructors provide instructional modifications that could include reteaching, smaller groupings in the general education classroom or some instruction in a child’s L1; it may be recommended that the student receive Tier 2 support.
**Tier 2**

In Tier 2, interventions are provided to the student. These interventions are often delivered in a small group setting and may be provided by a classroom teacher, reading specialist, Title I, speech and language teacher, ESL teacher, or teaching assistant. Tier 2 interventions are supplemental to the general education curriculum. Generally speaking, students who are performing at the bottom 20% of the class on CBMs may need to be provided with Tier 2 interventions. Tier 2 interventions may consist of targeted programs and strategies that address specific needs by supplementing more intensively the instruction that students received from the core curriculum presented to the class at large in Tier 1. In other words, these students may need intervention services that are more focused and that are typically delivered in small group contexts to meet the common academic needs of a small group of students. In Tier 2, progress monitoring occurs on a more frequent basis than it does during Tier 1. If students are not making adequate progress under Tier 2 services despite several attempts to implement and test the effectiveness of modified or alternative interventions, Tier 3 types of intervention services may be delivered.

**Tier 3**

Tier 3 services consist of specifically designed reading instruction. This may involve even more intensive individualized instruction that may occur within the context of extended instructional time, increased opportunities to practice skills, and a one-to-one instructional format.
Instructional effectiveness is continually evaluated throughout each tier of the model and decisions based on summative and formative assessment data are made across the three-tiered process. Summative assessment data are gathered more frequently and used to determine if changes in instruction need to be made. For instance, students may move from a Tier 3 level of instructional support to a Tier 2 or vice versa based on the level at which they are performing a skill. Formative assessment data is used to determine when a student has mastered essential skills and whether intervention needs to continue or is no longer required (Vaughn et al., 2006).

Response to Intervention and English Learners

RtI uses a multi-tiered structure of increasingly intensive and focused instruction and intervention for serving the needs of students with academic concerns. It is seen as a more effective process than more traditional approaches, which involve either waiting for a student to fail before intervening or identifying a potential need for special education services, then testing, determining eligibility, and placing the student. But for ELs, the RtI process raises some special issues. Because ELs face the challenge of learning new material, skills, and information in a new language, teachers need to use practices that have been shown to be effective in making instruction understandable for them (August & Shanahan, 2006; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008).

The first step in following the RtI model is ensuring that general education instruction reflects best practice and meets the students’ academic and linguistic needs. For ELs who struggle, we need to consider what instructional accommodations are
necessary for them to succeed academically. Regardless of the level of ELP, students who are identified as “at risk” in Tier 1 should be provided with research-supported interventions in Tier 2. If possible, the language of the intervention should correspond with the language of classroom instruction. The intensity of the intervention should be individualized and based on several factors, such as the student’s degree of risk and his or her rate of progress (Sun, Nam & Vanderwood, 2010).

Current research offers the following guidelines for effective implementation of Tier 2 interventions for ELs (Vaughn et al., 2010; Sun, et al., 2010).

- Provide intense, small-group reading intervention (three to six students) for students who are at risk for reading problems indicated by CBM assessments. Form groups based on reading ability.

- Provide explicit and systematic instruction in five critical areas: phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

- Emphasize development of conversational as well as academic vocabulary. Although students who speak another language develop social proficiency within the context of everyday living, cognitive academic language proficiency is dependent on formal schooling.

- Provide interactive teaching that allows for multiple opportunities to respond with corrective feedback.

- Establish goals using district or national benchmarks. This can be done by developing district norms based on screening data or by using previously developed benchmark criteria.
Monitor progress regularly to ensure that students are benefiting from the intervention and meeting their goals. The same assessment tools used to identify the students in Tier 1 can be used to monitor progress in Tier 2. Those are to establish initial goals and adjust them based on the student’s rate of growth. When the student’s progress is above his or her goal line, instructors should either increase the goal or exit the student from the intervention. If the student’s progress were equal to the goal line, instructors would continue the intervention. And, if the student’s progress is below the goal, instructors need to adjust the intervention.

Determine the frequency of progress monitoring by the severity of the problem. The general recommendation is that students at high risk for reading problems be monitored weekly or biweekly (Gersten et al., 2007).

Document at least seven to ten data points before making an educational decision about a student’s progress. Although there is no universal standard, typical practice is to have this as a minimum (Shinn, Good, & Stein, 1990).

Early intensive interventions conducted in small groups and implemented with fidelity may provide students with the extra boost they need to have success with the core curriculum.

Response to Intervention Tier 3 and English Learners

Before considering a student for special education, educators must determine whether the student’s academic difficulties more likely reflect a learning disability or limited English proficiency. According to researchers Vaughn et al., 2010 & Sun et al.,
2010, the following information must be considered:

- Compare the student’s rate of progress during intervention with other students of similar ELP.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the student’s educational history, including an examination of: 1. The quality of the instruction provided in Tiers 1 and 2, and whether the instruction was matched to the student’s needs. 2. Whether the critical components of literacy instruction were provided. 3. The intensity, including the frequency and duration, of past interventions. 4. Previous progress monitoring data, including initial performance, rate of progress, and whether past goals were met. 5. The fidelity of intervention implementation.

- If it is determined that the student qualifies for Tier 3 (special education support): Continue the intervention from Tier 2, with increased intensity, or develop a new intervention plan based on the student’s needs.

- Continue to monitor student progress.

Although the use of an RtI model with ELs has not been examined as frequently as with native English speakers, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that RtI can lead to positive outcomes for ELs. A recent report by the Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES) What Works Clearinghouse highly recommends using the RtI components of screening, evidence-based intervention, and progress monitoring with ELs (Gersten et al., 2007).

In the past, it was believed that low English proficiency prevented ELs from learning to read in English. As a result, ELs were not assessed with early reading measures until they reached adequate English proficiency. Contrary to this belief, current studies have found
that the level of ELP does not predict who will struggle with reading. In addition, ELs can be assessed using the same English early literacy screening tools that are used with their English only peers (Gersten et al., 2007). Furthermore, past studies have found that many poor readers, including those with low levels of English proficiency, can be brought to at least average levels of performance if they are provided with supplemental, high-quality intervention during the early stages of reading development (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2006).

There are many advantages to using RtI approaches with all learners, including ELs. These advantages are realized when schools provide appropriate universal screening at the beginning and middle of the year, at minimum, to identify students who are at risk for reading difficulties and to provide interventions to meet their needs. Determining that adequate instruction class-wide is occurring for ELs ensures that students are less likely to fall behind and that they will continue to thrive in the classroom. Using ongoing progress monitoring as a source of data to inform decision-making will facilitate both decision-making and students' progress. When students demonstrate reading difficulties, the provision of small-group intensive interventions targeting their instructional needs and then monitoring their progress ensures that instruction is modified to meet the needs of students (Vaughn et al., 2010).

The elementary teachers whose students I studied have used differentiated instruction to support the students in this study and their peers access core curriculum, but according to the RtI model, these Tier 1 strategies are not enough for some. A small group of students will be selected to receive additional support in vocabulary and reading
comprehension based on the results of the following assessments:

- AIMSweb is a web-based data management and reporting system used to determine Response to Intervention. This program provides a benchmark and progress monitoring system based on direct, frequent, and continuous student assessment. The district where the research is being conducted assesses all students three times annually and progress monitors students who are receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for reading and/or math. This has been ongoing since the 2008/2009 school year. Trend data is available on all students’ growth in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing, along with math computation, concepts and application.

- Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is a series of leveled books and recording sheets designed to allow teachers to determine students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension levels. DRA data is collected at the end of each grading period to determine student progress.

- ACCESS for ELLs is an ELP assessment given to kindergarten through 12th graders who have been identified as ELs. It is given annually in WIDA consortium member states to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English.

- Teacher observation during guided reading time. Guided reading is a teaching approach that is designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency. Guided reading occurs in a small-group setting because the small group allows for
interactions among readers that benefit all students in the group. The teacher
selects and introduces texts to readers, sometimes supports them while reading the
text, engages the readers in discussion, and performs a mini-lesson after the
reading. After reading a text, the teacher may extend the meaning of the text
through writing, text analysis, or another learning activity. The lesson may also
include work with words based on the specific needs of the small group (Fountas
and Pinnell, 1996).

The preceding documentation will be used to determine which EL students will be
assigned to a RtI instructional group that will be using vocabulary interventions to assist
their reading comprehension. RtI has the potential to affect change for ELs. RtI requires
the use of research-based practices that are specific to student needs. This instructional
support is provided to ELs with low performance in reading areas even when language
skills in English are low. Interventions can simultaneously address development of
language and literacy skills in English. This study investigates Text Talk as a tool for
improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for English Learners in Response to
Intervention groups. Data will be gathered and evaluated to determine which Text Talk
vocabulary strategies are effective methods for vocabulary and comprehension
development with first through third grade ELs in RtI groups and if strategies are not
successful, what adaptations are needed for ELs to have success? And, will vocabulary
acquisition and comprehension be improved by making these adaptations?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at what research finds effective as instructional methods
for teaching vocabulary. I began by discussing the importance of developing vocabulary for comprehension and fluency. I examined studies of how vocabulary instruction improved the vocabulary skills of native speakers and ELs. Discussions about robust vocabulary instruction designed by Beck et al. were presented. Finally, I looked specifically at the RtI model and the benefits of using this style of small group instruction to support ELs who need additional support in vocabulary, comprehension and literacy skills. In Chapter Three, I will present the methodology for this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The researcher investigating *Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups* seeks information to aid first through third grade ELs who are ‘at risk’ readers due to low comprehension and vocabulary skills. The Text Talk program, which incorporates a variety of rich and intensive vocabulary and comprehension activities designed by Beck et al. (2002) will be used for instruction. I want to know: 1. Do these researched-based strategies that work well with native English speakers also work well with ELs? 2. If strategies are not successful, what adaptations are needed for ELs to have success? 3. Will vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension be improved by making these adaptations?

This study aims to provide insight into the effectiveness of teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words and comprehension skills to ELs through the use trade books. After I determine the effectiveness of the intervention with no adaptations, I will adapt the lessons to include research-based instructional strategies for ELs to see what impact they have on the student’s ability to learn and retain new vocabulary words and improve overall comprehension. I am using teacher research, a form of action research, as the method for my study.
Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I will explain the methodologies that will be used in this study. First, the description and rationale of the research design will be introduced. Next, the data collection protocols will be presented and the procedures to be used will be described. Then, the method that will be used to analyze the data will be explained. Finally, the ethical considerations for this study will be discussed.

Research Paradigm

The goal of my research and also the goals reported by Beck et al. (2002) are to provide the reasons for teachers to teach vocabulary explicitly and to provide teachers with examples of vocabulary strategies that support instruction. In order to investigate my research question, I chose to do teacher research, a form of action research. Teacher research happens when teachers question their work and strive to enhance their skills in a way that benefits student learning. In the book *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding*, author Donald Freeman describes teacher research and how it can help teachers reflect on their practice. He provides a teacher researcher cycle with six elements. They are: inquiry, question/puzzle, data collection, data analysis, understandings, and publishing (1998).

- Inquiry is questioning why something is or is not occurring in the classroom.
- The question/puzzle element is adding the line of inquiry into the researchable question.
- Data collection is the actual gathering of the information or data.
- Data analysis is taking the information apart and putting it back together in order
to answer the question/puzzle.

- Understandings require looking at the new information learned from the research that was conducted. This information may provide avenues for further questions and more work.

- The final element is publishing, sharing this new information to educate others.

These six elements combine to create a cyclical process that I will use as a guide for my research. I have observed a pattern of our ELs having low-test scores in vocabulary and reading comprehension on the MCAs, MCAIIs, MCAIIIs, and AIMSweb data that I have analyzed. After recognizing this problem, I wanted to see if I could find a solution to help close the gap. I plan to implement a program that has proven successful in building vocabulary skills that have supported growth in overall reading of students. This program has been researched and found to be effective, but there is limited information about its success with ELs. I plan to use Beck et al.’s model and make accommodations when necessary based on monitoring of students’ successes. I plan to share my findings with colleagues in my district and members of the Title III consortium to which I belong, in hopes of improving vocabulary, comprehension and literacy for ELs.

Data Collection

Participants

The participants of this study are first through third grade ELs who have many attributes in common. These children have all received their formal schooling in this district. All of the students attended preschool all day three days per week and then were
enrolled in our full time kindergarten program. There is only one section per grade, so these children have all received their schooling from the same teachers, and all received the same core instruction. All of these children were born in the United States, but none of them spoke English when they came to school. The children are Spanish speakers and their families are from Latin America. These students range from beginning to developing readers and writers and are developing speakers of English. Test results will determine the number of children who will be participating in this small group instruction. Text Talk read-alouds designed by Beck and McKeown that focus on comprehension and using rich and extensive vocabulary activities will be used for instruction.

Table 3.1

*Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>First Grade</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>First Grade</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Setting

This study takes place in a small rural preschool through eighth grade school in the upper Midwest. There are approximately 210 students in attendance; 53 are ELs and all of our ELs are Spanish speakers. The primary level is representative of the school with 33% ELs and 50% students of color. We are a Title I school; 71% of our students live at or below the poverty level, qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Schools with at least 40% of students from low-income families receive financial assistance from federal Title I dollars for the purpose of closing the achievement gap (U. S. Department of Education, Title 1, Part A, 2006).

Research Site

The research will be conducted in the ESL classroom over a four-week period. RtI guidelines suggest that interventions continue for a period of three to four weeks. The children will receive 20 minutes of Text Talk instruction per day, along with another 30 minutes of ESL instructional time.

I plan to use data from MCAs, AIMSweb, CBMs and DRA assessments conducted last Spring and this Fall to identify students who scored below established benchmarks in vocabulary and literacy. Spring ACCESS for ELLs scores will be reviewed and teacher recommendations will be considered as the basis for deciding which children to include in the intervention groups used for this study.

Book and Word Selection

I will choose the books and vocabulary words for instruction from the Text Talk Professional Guide Level A which corresponds to Appendix A in Bringing Words to Life:
Robust Vocabulary Instruction by Beck et al. Appendix A provides a list of books and word lists for first through third grade levels. Text Talks level A supports kindergarten and first grade. The books chosen will be from the first grade level because the research will commence in the beginning of first grade. Using the books and word lists provided in Appendix A will ensure that vocabulary is grade level appropriate and that the words chosen are Tier 2 words.

Discussion of the Instruction

Once the group has been selected and permission has been granted, instruction will begin. I will follow the model designed by Beck et al. for developing vocabulary in the early grades. The method focuses on teaching words from texts that are read aloud to children, and presents activities that support young children and their need to make sense of words. This method has two goals: 1. To enhance comprehension through open questions that ask children to consider the ideas in the story, talk about them, and make connections among them as they continue the story and 2. Enhance vocabulary development (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

During this time, direct instruction in vocabulary will occur after the story is read and discussed; this provides a strong context in which to begin word introduction. It is suggested that teachers stop and give brief, child-friendly explanations of words while reading. Selected books and vocabulary words to be taught will come from Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction by Beck et al. and Text Talk; a program designed by Beck & McKeown in 2005 that includes all the books from Bringing Words to Life along with a professional guide to direct the instructor’s lessons. The following is
a list of some of the books being used for instruction, along with some of the vocabulary words that will be taught:

* A Pocket for Corduroy by Don Freeman, [*insistent, reluctant, drowsy*]

* The Scarecrow’s Hat by Ken Brown, [*swapped, grateful, benefit*]

* It Takes A Village by Jane Cowen-Fletcher, [*restless, wandered, responsible*]

* Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina, [*ordinary, disturb, imitate*]

* Dear Juno by Soyung Pak, [*soared, gentle, communicate*]

We will read one book per week and learn six vocabulary words per book. The following is an example of some of the vocabulary activities that will be used with the book *A Pocket for Corduroy* (Freeman, 1978). This is a story about a teddy bear named Corduroy who spends the night in a laundromat. The Tier 2 vocabulary words being taught for this book are *insistent, reluctant, and drowsy*.

I will modify the instruction slightly to include using the vocabulary word plus the infinitive, “*reluctant to go*” or “*reluctant to do*” and “*insistent that*…”. Beck’s model does not address the use of language features when teaching vocabulary, and these are a necessity when teaching ELs. One English language feature where errors are common for EL students is in the incorrect use of infinitives. EL students often pattern their English sentences after sentences in their native language, where often many rules (including the rules for infinitives) differ from the rules we use in English. Therefore, students may use sentences like: “I am to *reluctant to go to the game by myself*.” I will modify vocabulary lessons by including grammar lessons that support language learning and comprehension for the students when necessary. The NRP (2000) found that while approaches that are
similar to those used with native-language populations are effective, the research suggests that adjustments to these approaches are needed to have maximum benefit with language minority students.

The following is an example of the model I will employ. In *A Pocket for Corduroy*, Lisa was *reluctant to* leave the laundromat without Corduroy. *Reluctant* means you are not sure you want to do something. Say the word with me. Someone might be *reluctant* to eat a food that he or she never had before, or someone might be *reluctant* to ride a roller coaster because it looks scary. Tell us about something you would be *reluctant* to do. Try to use “*reluctant*” when you tell about it. You could start by saying something like “I would be *reluctant to* ______________.” What’s the word we’ve been talking about (Beck et al., 2002)?

The word *reluctant* will be contextualized for its role in the story “In the story, Lisa was *reluctant to* leave the laundromat without Corduroy.” Then, the children will be asked to repeat the word so that they can create a phonological representation of the word. “Say the word with me.” Next, the meaning of the word is explained. “*Reluctant* means you are not sure you want to do something.” Examples in contexts other than the one used in the story will be provided. “Someone might be *reluctant* to ride a roller coaster because it looks scary.” Children will interact with examples or provide their own examples. “Tell about something you would be *reluctant* to do. Try to use *reluctant* when you tell about it. You could start by saying something like, I would be *reluctant to* ______________.” Finally, the children will say the word again to reinforce its phonological representation. “What’s the word we’ve been talking about?” (Beck et al.,
Other activities that are suggested for instruction include:

- Questions, reasons and examples:
  
  If you were…?
  
  What is something you could do to…?
  
  Which of these things might…?

- Making choices: If any of the things I say might be examples of someone feeling*drowsy* say *drowsy*; if not, don’t say anything.
  
  Waking up from a nap.
  
  Riding your bike to school.
  
  Lying on the couch, watching T.V.
  
  Playing tag with your friends.

- Maintaining words: Bulletin boards can be created that have a copy of the story cover and words learned, along with a tally sheet next to it. A tally mark is added to the chart when the teacher or children in the class use the words.
  
  Vocabulary research points out the need for frequent encounters with words so that they become permanent (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). Providing a variety of activities to experience new words will help students cement the acquisition of those words. The researcher will use the following steps to aid vocabulary instruction.

  - Introduce vocabulary/read a story.
  
  - Contextualize the word within the story.
  
  - Have the children say the word.
• Provide a student-friendly explanation of the word.
• Present examples of the word used in contexts different from the story context.
• Engage children in activities that get them to interact with the words.
• Have children say the word.

These activities and the student responses to them will provide an observational means of evaluating student achievement. This information will be documented and reviewed to determine if accommodations are needed to aid understanding.

**Data Collection Technique 1: Vocabulary Assessments**

I plan to give a pre and post vocabulary assessment each week to determine the number of learned words. The vocabulary assessment tool that I plan to use is the quick check assessment provided by the curriculum guide. There are six questions that assess students’ understanding of the six target vocabulary words used in a given Text Talk lesson. An example of this type of question from the book *New Shoes for Silvia* asks, “Which word is about using things in a new way, *resourceful* or *perhaps*?” (Beck & McKeown, 2005a, p. 77). In this case, *resourceful* and *perhaps* are two of the six target vocabulary words presented as part of that book’s Text Talk lesson. This assessment was read aloud to students so that it accurately measured student understanding of target vocabulary words and not their ability to read. The challenge in using multiple-choice tests as a vocabulary assessment can be that students may be able to guess the right answer by chance or they may be distracted by incorrect choices. The benefit to multiple choice tests is that teachers can purposely make them more or less difficult, depending on the level of word knowledge they want to assess (Beck & McKeown, 2002).
Data Collection Technique 2: Word Wall

A classroom word wall will be created using the vocabulary words from the story we are reading. Child friendly definitions will be posted. Children will be encouraged to use the words in a variety of contexts and notice the words in other contexts. They will be rewarded for their use and observations of posted words. A chart with stickers will be used to document word usage, with each student having a different colored star sticker to represent their contributions.

Data Collection Technique 3: Comprehension Assessments

I plan to provide a variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate their comprehension of the books they have read. Some of the tools used for the assessments are character sketches, timelines, setting descriptions, plot, and problem and solution. Formative assessment is a deliberate process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides actionable feedback used to adjust ongoing teaching and learning strategies to improve students’ attainment of curricular learning targets/goals (Mursky, 2015). The assessment tasks over the four-week period will be varied, authentic and performance based when possible. Performance-based assessment is the process of using student activities, rather than tests or surveys, to assess skills and knowledge. This form of assessment is most appropriate because of the age and skills of the students involved.

Data Collection Technique 4: Reflective Journal

I plan to document my observations of the lessons that I teach and reflect on my practice and student understanding. This instructional tool will allow me to see where
changes are needed. It becomes a reflection tool to record my thoughts about what is
going well and changes I need to make for future lessons. I will also document unusual
occurrences in the classroom that may affect the lessons. I plan to do my journaling at the
end of the school week.

Ethics

This study will employ the following safeguards to protect the rights of the
participants: 1. Written research goals in English and Spanish will be shared with the
participants and their guardians: 2. Informed consent through written permission will be
obtained from participant’s guardians: 3. Anonymity of participants will be maintained
by changing their names: 4. Names will be changed on written documents: 5. The
participants will be observed in their natural setting.

Conclusion

This chapter described the research paradigm that was used to investigate Text
Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for English Learners
in Response to Intervention groups. It also described the setting and the participants of
the study. Data collection and procedures were discussed, and the ethics of the study were
reported.

Chapter Four describes in detail the Text Talk lessons used in the study. Next,
descriptions of the adaptations made to the existing lessons are reported. Then, the results
of the vocabulary and comprehension assessments are conveyed.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The researcher investigated Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for English Learners in Response to Intervention groups. Text Talk, a research-based program has proven successful for English speaking children, and I wanted to know if it would be as successful a teaching method for second language learners. A small percentage of the ELs I teach require additional small group reading instruction that focuses on comprehension and vocabulary. I used pretests and posttests to measure how many vocabulary words students learned using the Text Talk lessons as they were originally written in comparison with how many they learned when adaptations were made. I used a variety of tools to assess the students’ comprehension of the books we read. I recorded anecdotal observations weekly. I first present an overview of the two week-long lessons taught with the original Text Talk curriculum. Then, I explain the changes I made to the Text Talk lessons in the following two week-long lessons. Finally, I present the results of the pretests and posttests of the vocabulary words learned and discuss the results of the assessments and their success. I interjected my recorded observations into the related lessons.

Text Talk Lesson Design

Each lesson in the Text Talk Professional Guide is presented in a week-long, daily, 20-minute session. The program focuses on building comprehension skills and
learning six target vocabulary words from a trade book that is read aloud to the class. I used lessons from the Text Talk Professional Guide level A (Beck & McKeown, 2005), which is written for kindergarten and first grade. I chose this level because the students in the study were first through third graders who were performing at the bottom 15-20% of their class. They had not experienced these books during Text Talk instruction and the Accelerated Reader (AR) ATOS book levels were between a 2.4 to a 3.7, so they were age and grade appropriate for the students. ATOS stands for Advantage/TASA Open Standard, ATOS book levels are assigned using the ATOS readability formula. For example, a book level of 4.5 means that the text could likely be read independently by a student whose reading skills are at the level of a typical fourth-grade student during the fifth month of school (Renaissance Learning, 2014).

I started implementing the program the third week of school, after I had completed all necessary W-APT testing and reviewed the results of the Spring 2015 ACCESS tests. The classroom teachers had finished conducting DRA assessments and the Title I and RtI instructors had concluded the AIMSweb assessments. This data was reviewed to determine which students needed extra instructional support and specifically what content areas they would receive instruction in. Title and RtI groups were established and these children were scheduled for an added 20 to 30-minute period daily of specified academic support in addition to their core reading and/or math class. Title I, RtI and ESL specialists delivered these interventions. Each teacher was assigned students based on their needs. My students were the ELs who needed Title I and RtI interventions for reading. Key features of RtI Tier 2 intervention include: 1. Supplementary resources
to implement high-quality instructional strategies: 2. Targeted intervention at high levels of intensity and 3. Ongoing formative assessment to monitor students’ responses to intervention often referred to as progress monitoring (WIDA RtI2 for ELLs, 2013).

Text Talk was the supplemental resource used and the stories selected were ones that the students had not already heard presented through Text Talk. I taught the first two lessons (weeks) without collecting data. I felt that it was important for the students and me to become acquainted with the program format first. The read-aloud books that were used the first two weeks were *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999) and *New Shoes for Silvia* (Pinkney, 1993). The research began on Week Three with *It’s Mine* (Lionni, 1996) Week Four was *Edward the Emu* (Knowles, 1998) and Week Five, *The Scarecrow’s Hat* (Brown, 2001) finishing out Week Six with *A Pocket for Corduroy* (Freeman, 1978). The Text Talk guide breaks the read-aloud lessons into five sessions, which fits into an uninterrupted school week. Sessions One and Two focus on developing language and comprehension while reading the story. Sessions Three and Four introduce and develop the target vocabulary words. Session Five integrates vocabulary and comprehension by returning to the read-aloud to review and assess the words.

Prior to teaching the first few lessons, I reviewed the instructional CD provided to insure fidelity of my delivery. I gave a pretest at the beginning of the first session each week in order to determine which of the target vocabulary words the students already knew to compare with the words they learned at the end of the week. I followed the Text Talk guide’s outline of reading and discussing the book over the first two days. I used the scripted questions and clarification notes provided in the Text Talk guide. These notes are
attached to specific pages of the read-aloud books and provide high-level comprehension questions and opportunities to discuss and summarize the story at specific points (Beck & McKeown, 2005).

Sessions Three and Four each introduced three target vocabulary words, two from the story, and one about the story with explanations of how the words are used in the story and opportunities for the class to say the word out loud. For example, in *It’s Mine!*, the first story we read, the script says, “If two friends are arguing about who gets the window seat on the bus, they are *bickering*. Let’s say the word that means arguing about things that are not important” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.16). This was followed by a discussion in which I provided an example and the students said the target vocabulary word only if it made sense in the context of the example. Using *bickering* as an example, I said, “I will describe some things. If they sound like people *bickering*, say, ‘*bickering*’. If not, don’t say anything.” I read the three examples: 1. A brother and a sister arguing over who will get to use a blue crayon (*bickering*): 2. A brother and a sister sharing an apple (no response): 3. Two sisters arguing over who is better at soccer (*bickering*)? After each example is read, the class is expected to respond as a group (Beck & McKeown, 2005, p.16). Next, I provided a sample question. “If you were arguing with a friend about playing on the swings, what could you say about what you are doing?” Most often student volunteers provided the correct answer. I then reinforced the expected response by repeating the script used in the lesson. “My friend and I were *bickering* over who got the swing first” (Beck & McKeown, 2005, p.16). Lastly, I used the target word in a sentence and asked the students to say the word one final time. For instance, “What’s the
word that means arguing about things that are not important (*bickering*)?” (Beck & McKeown, 2005, p.16).

Session Five was a review of the vocabulary words, a final connection to the book and a cumulative review of previously learned words. As part of the review, students were asked to use the vocabulary words to show their understanding of the story. For instance, the frogs *bicker* a lot. “Ask the children to use the word *bickering* as they give examples of *bickering* the toad heard” (Beck & McKeown, 2005, p. 20). The posttest is given at the end of Session Five.

Observations of Lessons without Adaptations

The story for Week One of the researched lessons without adaptations was *It’s Mine* (Lionni, 1985). This story is a fable, the literary element falls under Folktales, and tales have a lesson to teach. The students were told that their job was to figure out the lesson from the story. The comprehension focus for *It’s Mine* was summarizing important events in the story, which I stopped and talked about with the students every few pages while reading the story. The Text Talk notes provide a prompt for the teacher to read. The first summary came on page 15 and said; “So where are we? Let’s talk about the story from the beginning to where we are now” (Beck & McKeown, 2005). The authors report that the questions posed by the Text Talk read-alouds are open-ended and elicit greater language production and promote building meaning from the story in contrast to retrieving simple answers. They say that this type of questioning provides scaffolding for comprehension by asking the children to consider events and ideas and connecting them as the story moves along (Beck & McKeown, 2005).
The program designers prefer that illustrations not be shown until after each page is read aloud. They believe this technique encourages children to make meaning from the language itself (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p. 8). I struggled with this suggestion; the children are young and often the illustrations keep them engaged. When I conduct classroom read-alouds, I have always used the illustrations as a strategy to support learning; they help build background and aid understanding of the setting, character, and the plot. The illustrations often foster predictions and inferences. I found that while the students were accustomed to viewing the pictures while being read to, they did not question why they didn’t see the pictures until after I had read the page. Their answers to the questions I asked were usually correct, and they were able to make predictions, and inferences and properly summarize the story events. For example: when asked, “How do the frogs behave?” Student responses were; “They were fighting.” “Bickering!” In this instance, the student used the vocabulary word only having heard the brief definition, and the other child provided the correct answer. “Why did the toad come to talk to the frogs?” “Because they were fighting.” “They were too loud!” “Rupert thinks the Earth is mine.” “Frogs own it and don’t share with their friends.” The students correctly summarized what had happened up to this point, while depending on the language and not the illustrations to build meaning.

On page seven of the story we ran into our first vocabulary words; the Text Talk note has the instructor stop reading here and briefly clarify the meaning of the word. Beck & McKeown, (2005) state that elaborating on the word could interrupt focus of the story and interfere with developing comprehension of the ideas and events. The sentence
from the story was: “They quarreled and quibbled from dusk to dawn.” Then I say: “When people are quarreling and quibbling, they are arguing. Dawn is the beginning of the day when the sun rises. At dusk, it is getting dark” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.16 & 17). From the looks on the children’s faces, it was obvious to me that further clarification was needed for the EL students in the kindergarten and first grade classes. After talking about the time of day the sun rises and using the word “morning” as a reference for dawn and discussing when it gets dark, students came up with evening and noted, that they were opposites; thus, we were able to determine that the frogs fought all day long. Beck & McKeown discuss giving a comprehensive review of vocabulary words to support and emphasize key vocabulary in the Text Talk Guide (p.12). This information is a part of the introduction section called the ESL Bridge: Supporting Comprehension and Vocabulary Development in English Language Learners. The document offers a list of ideas for teachers on how to adapt content, tailor instruction, and emphasize key vocabulary, and lists a variety of instructional strategies to aid student learning. While I needed to make adaptations at this point, they were in line with the author’s suggestions for ELs.

The beginning section of the vocabulary development on Days Three and Four started with explicitly teaching the words. Explanations were provided, along with discussion and summary. The second part of each lesson was vocabulary development. This included Word Association: “Which word does not sharing make you think of? (selfish)” Choosing the Best Answer: “Who would be selfish… A child eating all the popcorn in a bowl or a child sharing popcorn with his friends? Why?” Concept Webs:
“Write the word harmony on the board. Then ask the children to name times they behaved in harmony? As you record their answers have them explain them.” Finishing the Idea: “I desperately need to eat when…” and Using All The Words: “Would someone who drank all the milk be selfish or desperate?” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.16 & 17).

From the beginning of the first vocabulary lesson, I noticed that there would be a number of occasions where I would need to provide supports for the EL students to understand the meanings of other words from the stories and from the comprehension questions being asked by. For example: the question from the Word Association “Which word does not sharing make you think of?” was confusing and needed explanation, as did others.

The first three vocabulary words learned were bickering, defiantly and harmony.

The words the authors used to describe bickering were “arguing” and “quarrel”. The first example was: “There is no peace because of the endless bickering. That means the three frogs kept arguing for no reason, and it caused a lot of confusion” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.16 & 17). We had to talk about arguing for no reason and what that meant. We talked about words that are similar or synonyms and the word fighting that they knew better. The next explanation was “If someone is bickering, he quarrels about unimportant things.” This generated a quick lesson on prefixes and instructing that ‘un’ means not. So to rephrase, “The frogs were fighting about things that were not important.” The word defiantly required repeated practice in pronouncing the word by breaking it up into syllables for students to hear all the sounds. This word also provided the opportunity for a mini lesson about how the suffix ‘ly’ changes the adjective defiant to an adverb: This information was provided to the second and third graders only. On Day Two of the
vocabulary lesson for *It’s Mine*, students learned the words *recognized, desperately* and *selfish*. The Text Talk guide provided explanations of these words which was concerning to me, the practice samples used different word tenses to explain the target word. For example: “In the story, the frogs *recognized* that what they thought was a stone was really the toad.” And then, “If you *recognize* someone or something, you know the person or you are aware of the situation” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.18 & 19). The words *desperately* and *selfish* both were explained as an adjective and the adverb equivalent. The preceding examples necessitated both grammar and pronunciation support and practice.

The last lesson of the week provided a review of the vocabulary words, including a reconnection to the story. After repeated practice and a variety of activities to explore the story and vocabulary, the students were successful in both comprehension of the story and their ability to demonstrate knowledge of the strategy being stressed. However, the gain in vocabulary from Day One to Day Five was minimal, with an average gain of 1.2 words learned. I was puzzled about this, because when we reviewed the words, the students seemed to understand them, which made me question the formal assessment. The directions for the assessment had the students determine if the sentence made sense or not. I think the problems stemmed from here. The prompt began with: “I will read some sentences that make sense and some that don’t make sense. You decide. If a sentence makes sense, circle the sun. If it doesn’t make sense, circle the rain cloud.” 1. “A brother and sister who never argue, *bicker* all the time.” 2. “If a boy *defiantly* answers his mother, he will happily obey her” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p.16 & 17). I think this
format was confusing. I don’t think that EL students are able to make sense of this questioning. And I don’t think that it indicated that they didn’t understand the vocabulary words in the context in which they learned them. I know the goal was to have them understand the words in different context, but I think there was a better way to assess them. As a matter of fact, there are three different review activities on Day Five. I think that the vocabulary wrap-up is a better assessment tool. The following questions were examples from the story. 1. “Which word means peaceful living, harmony or selfish?” 2. “If you were thinking only of yourself, would you be selfish or recognized?” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p. 20). I think these questions are a better measure of what the children learned and can answer.

Lesson Two was the story of Edward the Emu. The comprehension focus of this fictional story was character traits and the main character was Edward the Emu. We spent a few minutes prior to reading the story building background about emus. After learning they were from Australia, we pulled out the globe to see where Australia is located, deciding that the only place we might see one would be in a zoo. This story was told through rhyme, it starts out with:

Edward the emu was sick of the zoo,

There was nowhere to go, there was nothing to do,

And compared to the seals that lived right next door,

Well being an emu was frankly a bore. (Knowles, 1998)

I asked the students to listen for what Edward says that rhymes. When I finished reading each page, the hands would go up to tell me the rhyming words, and as the story went
along they were soon predicting what they thought would be coming next.

We proceeded with the curriculum format by reading the story the first two days. We stopped and discussed the Text Talk notes where it was indicated, often to clarify story ideas and give child-friendly definitions of the chosen vocabulary words. Every few pages we stopped to summarize what had happened in the story up to that point and make predictions about what might occur next. We also recognized and expanded on the notion of character traits. Reading this story was fun; the students were engaged and quickly began to participate. It became obvious to me at this point that the type of questions being posed by the authors truly did elicit more language production. Even the students who are more hesitant to speak were offering answers, of more than one word. With that being said there still were many words that were not the focused vocabulary of the story for which I needed to provide definitions and explanations, for example: “Well, being an emu was \textit{frankly} a \textit{bore}”. and “He even does a \textit{stint} slithering with snakes.” (Knowles, 1998) The children did not understand what “frankly a bore” meant or what “stint” meant in the context of the story.

Days Three and Four were spent introducing and developing the vocabulary words. Some of the words were easier this week: \textit{amusing} they understood quickly because the story was funny and they made that connection. \textit{Mimic} was another word that was easy to understand; we had fun \textit{mimicking} (copying) each other and talking about siblings who had \textit{mimicked} them. \textit{Gumption} was a word that the children were unable to comprehend. We employed all the examples provided to no avail. Zero out of seven children got that word correct on the vocabulary assessment posttest.
Detest, snarled and content were the other three vocabulary words this week. One of the activities used to develop the vocabulary was Why Stems: “Why might a dog snarl at a man with a stick?” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p. 28 & 29). Students answered; “The dog was afraid of him.” and “He hit him before.” I was pleased that the students were able to apply their understanding of the vocabulary to a context different than the story we had read.

I really liked the book connections that were made during the last day of the session. It was a review of the vocabulary words from previous stories that were used to boost the comprehension of the current story. One question was; “Which animal did you think Edward best lived in harmony with?” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p. 32). Harmony was a vocabulary word from the story It’s Mine. Another section from the lesson that supported language and literacy was the shared writing activity; of the six vocabulary words selected each week, four were from the story and two were about the story. These words either fit a character trait or a story theme. This particular week we wrote about things that make you feel content. In the course of a week this program, which was designed for all children, provided activities that integrated all language domains (i.e., listening, reading, speaking and writing), and this feature is integral to our teaching of ELs.

The comprehension activity for the week was a character sketch of Edward. The younger students used words to describe him, similar to a word web, and the older children had a cartoon template to draw pictures of different scenes from the story and write sentences to describe Edward. It was a successful activity for all students. Edward
was a larger than life character who was easy for them to describe.

Lesson

I adapted the Text Talk lessons using a variety of strategies that are research based, well-documented supports to aid in both language learning and reading comprehension. I also included mini grammar lessons based on the text being read and my knowledge of second language learning and my student cohort. Many of the strategies I employed were based on prior trainings I have attended, PLC work, interventions I learned from staff development opportunities provided by our district and personal research I initiated to aid my instruction. Strategies were chosen for their usefulness in helping teachers to scaffold content and language with children in the process of learning English as a new language. Many of the strategies I used are also used in non-EL classrooms to aid content and language learning so the students were familiar with them.

The term “instructional strategy” refers to a generalized learning or teaching technique that is applicable across content areas. Effective teachers have knowledge of a wide array of instructional strategies, and they choose the most effective ones for specific teaching and learning environments (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). Most strategies are content-neutral and can be used in a variety of teaching environments. The strategies described here have been chosen to reflect five research-based principles of scaffolded instruction for ELs:

1. To focus on academic language, literacy, and vocabulary
2. To link background knowledge and culture to learning
3. To increase comprehensible input and language output
4. To promote classroom interaction

5. To stimulate higher order thinking and the use of learning strategies (Levine, Smallwood, & Haynes, 2012a, 2012b).

These five core principles are essential to academic success for English language learners, representing both research findings and best practices (Levine, Lukens, & Smallwood, 2013).

The strategies I tried involved using visual aids, activating prior knowledge, building background knowledge, providing grammar lessons, practicing pronunciation and providing extra opportunities for review and reinforcement. I adapted the Word Winner Chart portion after the second week to better suit student learning. The intervention time was limited to 20 minutes per day and this curriculum required five sessions to complete, so I selected adaptations that were the most meaningful to understanding and timely so as not to add more days. I chose not to adapt the comprehension questions and vocabulary explanations provided in the Text Talk curriculum notes. I also followed the basic format of the curriculum, in that I read the book over the first two sessions, provided opportunities to work with the target vocabulary words in the next two sessions, and spent the fifth session reviewing before the assessment. I felt it was important to keep the comprehension questions, vocabulary definitions and basic format of the curriculum in place during the adapted lessons in order to keep the foundations of Text Talk intact. I will now describe the adaptations used throughout the lessons.
Word Winner Chart

After following the Text Talk protocol the first two weeks, and looking over the anecdotal notes and the observations I had made, I felt it was necessary to make adjustments to the Word Winner Chart. For each vocabulary word card, I decided to add definitions, provide pictures and bring in realia to support learning and provide scaffolds for the vocabulary words that were taught. When talking about the words being learned, students often brought up similar words that they knew. We added these words (synonyms) to the target word cards also; this way the students could make the connections when reading them.

Another change I made was in the posting of the vocabulary word cards. The Text Talk guide has you remove the prior week’s cards when beginning a new lesson. I felt it was necessary to grow the word wall and kept all the words up. This was beneficial, as we were able to make connections to previously read stories and vocabulary at the weeks end. Some previously learned words were similar to new words we learned and could be easily found when they were displayed. It also added to my print-rich language classroom.

I made one final change to The Word Winner Chart; the Text Talk program incorporates the chart into its daily practice. Children are encouraged to listen for and use the displayed words and tally every time they hear or speak them. I encouraged this practice and students excitedly reported to me when it occurred, but it would not work as a data source for my research. I only have the children 45 minutes daily and do not have the opportunity to encourage or incorporate the new vocabulary throughout the day; I
certainly felt that this would be beneficial in a primary classroom though.

**Instructional Supports**

When possible I used images from the read-aloud to support the students’ understanding of the book. For example, in the book *Edward the Emu* (Knowles, 1998), one of the vocabulary words was *snarled* and it was used in the book to describe the lion’s reaction to Edward in his cage at the zoo. In that case, we all practiced *snarling* and I took a picture of the *snarling* children and attached it to the word *snarled* on the word wall. In other cases, images were difficult to find and required additional explanation because of the abstract nature of the word. An example of this was the word *selfish*. With this word I asked the students to use words that describe being *selfish*, and we put them in a speech bubble by the word. Words the students used were “mine”, “no”, “not nice”, “won’t share”.

Other visual aids I brought into the classroom helped build background and supported the students’ understanding of the words and the story. I brought in straw, a feather, wool and a wool sweater when we read *A Straw Hat for Scarecrow*. In the story *It Takes a Village*, Kokou was *restless*. *Restless* was one of the vocabulary words, and after reading that section I had the students show me what *restless* would look like while sitting in their chairs. This added step was fun, quick, and if a student didn’t know what the word meant, they were able to pick it up from their neighbor and fidget in the chair too. Kokou also *wandered* around the village, so we too walked slowly around the school while students took turns leading us. In preparing for *A Pocket for Corduroy*, I picked up a pair of corduroy pants at the Goodwill that we cut up, and the students each took a
square with them; we also used the fabric square for the culminating activity at the end of the lesson. These additions provided added support for the vocabulary and comprehension of the stories.

Review

I included opportunities for students to review and reinforce the new vocabulary words and key content throughout the five sessions. We always took a few minutes at the beginning of each day to review what we had previously learned and reinforce key literary elements that were targeted each week. This provided another opportunity for language production and building meaning from the discussions. For *The Scarecrow’s Hat*, the literary element was fiction, so as we did our picture walk I asked the children to give me an example of what in the story was fictional. Students answered; “Chickens don’t talk.” “Owls don’t wear glasses.” “Badgers don’t use walking sticks.” This provided me with an observational assessment that confirmed the students understanding of the fictional aspect of this story.

The comprehension focus for *The Scarecrow’s Hat* was summarizing by retelling important events. When we did our daily review together I encouraged authentic approaches to help the students practice and show what they knew. We began with a list on the Smartboard of the characters and the item they would trade for an item they wanted. The following day the students picked a character and acted out their part. There was predictable language used throughout the story, which caused the students to participate in the reading when they knew what the character was going to say next. For instance, “That’s a nice walking stick,” said Chicken to Badger. “Yes, it is,” said Badger.
“But I’d swap my walking stick for a ribbon any day.” This pattern continued with each character. The children enjoyed the dramatic play and chimed in during familiar parts of the story. The final assessment after reading the story for the last time was differentiated because of the student’s ages and levels, but the results were still comparable. They were to create a timeline of events using pictures, words, phrases or a combination. Authentic assessments are best suited to help ELs show what they have actually learned.

A form of practice that I incorporated was to go back to the story when teaching the vocabulary words. I would reread the section that included the word so we understood the context in which it came prior to the program’s introducing and developing vocabulary activities. Researchers agree that repeated readings should focus on short chunks of text and that the focus of the instruction should be on both vocabulary and comprehension (Rasinski, *The Reading Teacher*, May 2012). Rereading helps students develop a deeper understanding of what they have read (Roskos and Newman, 2014). I added a complete reread of the weekly story via YouTube prior to our review and culminating activities at each weeks end. Often, I was able to find a copy of the author reading their book. It was good for the students to hear another reader deliver the story.

“Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success” (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). “It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Test Results

**Test Results: Vocabulary Assessments**

The results of the vocabulary assessment for each of the lessons are reported
below. There were six target vocabulary words in each of the four read-aloud books.

The results indicate that the adapted lessons seem to have produced a higher level of total vocabulary words learned than the lessons without adaptations.

Table 4.1:

Lesson without adaptation: *It’s Mine*, AR level 2.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Words Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average words learned: 1.3
Table 4.2:

Lesson without adaptation: *Edward the Emu*, AR level 3.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Words Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average words learned: 1.0

Table 4.3

Lesson with adaptation: *The Scarecrow’s Hat*, AR level 3.2

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Students</th>
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<th>Words Learned</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Student 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average words learned: 2.6
Lesson with adaptation: *A Pocket for Corduroy*, AR level 3.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Words Learned</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Student 7</td>
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</table>

Average words learned: 2.4

The Text Talk lessons without adaptations resulted in an average gain of 1.3 vocabulary words for Week One and 1.0 vocabulary words in Week Two, with a total average of vocabulary words learned during the lessons without adaptation being 1.2 words. The Text Talk lessons with adaptations resulted in an average gain of 2.6 vocabulary words the first week and 2.4 vocabulary words the second week. The total average of vocabulary words learned during adapted lessons was 2.5 vocabulary words. Thus, the lessons that were adapted produced an average increase of 1.3 vocabulary words learned over a two-week period, almost twice the average number of vocabulary words learned by these ELs, with small accommodations made to assist comprehension.

**Test Results: Comprehension Assessments**

This curriculum has strong features that support comprehension, and each Text
Talk lesson focuses on a specific comprehension skill. Every lesson links standards and ELA objectives in the plan. The missing piece is the language objectives, which I added right next to the content objectives for my reference and for the next time the lesson is taught. Language objectives are lesson objectives that specifically outline the type of language that students will need to learn and use in order to accomplish the goals of the lesson. Quality language objectives complement the content knowledge and skills identified in content area standards and address the aspects of academic language that will be developed or reinforced during the teaching of grade-level content concepts (Echevarria & Short, 2010).

Students are led to comprehend each book through discussions, and the teachers are provided notes as a resource for questions that scaffold and support comprehension and the opportunity to monitor it. The curriculum provides an opportunity to informally make observational assessments, which works well as it is designed, but in order to use it as a resource for RtI support, I needed to add formative assessments to be able to track student progress. I developed an assessment for each of the four lessons being studied. I wanted to compare the student’s comprehension scores between lessons that followed the curriculum design with lessons where adaptations were made.

The first lesson was the story *It’s Mine! It’s Mine!* is a tale that has a moral. The animal characters act and talk like humans. “What do they say and do that real people might do? What lesson does the story teach” (Beck, & McKeown, 2005a, p. 20)? There are four key characters in the story, so I asked for one example about each character where they acted or talked like a human and I wanted an answer to the question “What
lesson does the story teach?” I had the students fold a blank paper in half and then in half again. Each quadrant was for one character. The students wrote words, phrases or sentences about the human characteristic of the animal. Then, on the back of the paper, they described the lesson the story taught. Prior to working on the assignment, we brainstormed words, names and events from the story. I wrote these on the Smartboard as a reference for the students who needed them. I assigned eight points for this work.

Table 4.5

Assessment: Fictional Trait/Story Lesson, It’s Mine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assessment: Folktale 8 points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
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Average number correct 4.9 out of 8. Average percent correct 61%

The second lesson was the story Edward the Emu. The main character of this story was Edward. Thinking about the things Edward says and does can help the students determine what he was like. That was the goal of the performance assessment for this lesson. The students had a picture of Edward and were to write words, phrases or sentences to describe the different things Edward does and says in the story; they were
also asked to describe what changed at the end of the story.

Table 4.6

Assessment: Character Sketch, *Edward the Emu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assessment: Character sketch 8 points</th>
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<tbody>
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Average number correct 4.3 out of 8. Average percent correct 54%

The comprehension focus for *The Scarecrow’s Hat* was plot. Were the students able to summarize the story by retelling important events? I differentiated the assessment based on age, language proficiency and ability. Students were provided a list of characters and asked to put them in order of occurrence, and were also to include what the animal swapped or wanted to get in return. Images and names of the animals, and a list of the items that were swapped were cut up and available for use. Some students told me their answers and I wrote for them, some drew pictures, some wrote words and included pictures. I assigned one point for each included event, for a total of eight points.
Table 4.7

Assessment: Plot: *The Scarecrow’s Hat*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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Average number correct 7.7 out of 8. Average percent correct 96%

*A Pocket for Corduroy* is a story about a bear that has a problem. The comprehension focus was problem/solution. Corduroy has a problem and gets into trouble. Sometimes one problem leads to another. The students were asked to show, tell or write about Corduroy’s problem and how it was solved.
Table 4.8

Assessment: Problem/Solution, *A Pocket for Corduroy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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Average number correct 5.7 out of 8. Average percent correct 71%

The assessments used to evaluate comprehension of the stories that were read indicated that the students achieved higher scores on the lessons when adaptations that assist second language learning, were included. Text Talk lessons without adaptations resulted in an average score of 4.9 out of 8, or 61% correct for Week One and 4.3 out of 8, or 54% correct in Week Two. The total average score for lessons without adaptation was 58% correct. The Text Talk lessons with adaptations resulted in an average score of 7.7 out of 8 or 96% correct the first week and 5.7 out of 8 or 71% correct the second week. The total average assessment score for lessons with adaptations was 84% correct. Thus, the lessons that were adapted reported an increase from 58% to 84% correct. This was a significant gain in understanding for the participating EL students; this 41% increase was gained by making small changes to the existing program.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter described the *investigation of Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups*. The Text Talk lessons used in the study were explained. The adaptations made to subsequent lessons were discussed to determine if they improved learning for ELs. The results of both the vocabulary and comprehension assessments were reported, and their results were discussed. My data showed that vocabulary and comprehension scores were higher for ELs participating in the study when adaptations to the lessons were employed.

In Chapter Five, I present the major findings of the current study, implications of using Text Talk as an intervention tool, limitations of this investigation, recommendations for future research, and how the results will be communicated and used.
The focus of the current study was: Investigating Text Talk as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups. Was this research-based supplemental literacy program, which has proven success in the classroom, a program that promoted vocabulary and comprehension growth with second language learners who received extra time and instruction to strengthen their skills? Beck & McKeown, (2002, 2005, & 2008) robust vocabulary instruction including Text Talk was developed for native English speakers; they do provide information and suggestions for instructors called the Text Talk ESL Bridge: Supporting Comprehension and Vocabulary Development in English Language Learners. This section offers ideas on how to adapt content, emphasize key vocabulary, tailor instruction and interactions with the students, and use specific strategies to support and scaffold student learning. I was searching for materials to use in my RtI intervention group, and this section made me question whether this curriculum would benefit my students.

In Chapter Four, I presented an overview of the lessons taught with the original Text Talk curriculum. Next, I explained the adaptations I made to the Text Talk lessons. Then, I presented the results of the vocabulary and comprehension assessments. In this chapter, I highlighted the major findings of my research, the implications of these results for other educators, the limitations of the study, areas for further research, and how the
results of this research will be communicated.

Major Findings

“Direct vocabulary instruction during read-alouds with EL interventions proved effective in the RtI framework” (Sook, 2016). EL students learned more vocabulary words when adaptations were made to the lessons. The Text Talk lessons with adaptations resulted in a total average of 2.5 vocabulary words learned each week in comparison to a total average of 1.2 vocabulary words learned during the lessons without adaptation. Thus, the lessons that were adapted had an average increase of 1.3 vocabulary words learned each week over a two-week period, twice the average number of vocabulary words learned by these ELs with small changes added to the curriculum. As an experienced ESL teacher, I have learned that time spent making small adjustments to lessons makes the materials more comprehensible for the EL students.

The assessments used to evaluate comprehension of the lessons learned indicated that the students achieved higher scores when adaptations that support second language learning were enlisted. Text Talk lessons without adaptations resulted in a total average score of 58% correct. The total average assessment scores for lessons with adaptations were 84% correct. Therefore, the lessons that were adapted reported an increase from 58% to 84% correct. This is a significant gain in understanding for the participating EL students; this 41% increase was gained by making small changes to the existing program. While I wasn’t able to determine which of the supports was the most effective, I know that the dramatic play was employed the first week of adaptations when comprehension
score averages were 96% correct.

Implications

The selection and implementation of an effective research-based intervention program is critical in the development of a school-wide reading initiative. Identifying a program that aligns with research and fits the needs of the learners will realize long-term benefits for students’ reading acquisition and vocabulary development.

Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (2005) scientifically proved Text Talk’s effectiveness in increasing students’ vocabulary knowledge. The program is based on current reading research that stresses the importance of teaching sophisticated words, accompanied by rich student-teacher interactions to increase students’ achievement. Text Talk provides explicit instruction of sophisticated vocabulary words and work with words that are above a student’s independent reading level, which helps develop rich vocabulary and concepts. Teachers lead interactive conversations about read-aloud text, asking open-ended questions and present information to deepen students’ understanding of the featured vocabulary words. Each lesson focuses on a comprehension strategy, also. Teachers preview each read-aloud story and instruct children on key story ideas. As teachers read the story aloud, they scaffold comprehension by asking the class open-ended questions. They help students elaborate, connect, and reflect on important story ideas to enhance their understanding of the text. Children connect the literary elements of the story’s genre, such as fantasy and folktale, to the important story ideas and comprehension strategy (Simmons, Kame’enui, Beck, Brewer, & Fien, 2005).

The program design and the children’s literature that was used for instruction was
enjoyable and engaging. The adaptations that I used to assist the EL students were effective and furthered both vocabulary development and comprehension scores. One area that I did not measure, of which I was very aware, was the amount of increased language output. This was a highlight for me; the students blossomed in both skills and confidence over the course of my research.

Another observation I had during this process is that as teachers we are often asked to test and implement new programs. Many times I have been critical of particular elements and not continued to deliver the program as it was designed. I realized after teaching this program over the course of six weeks that my feelings and findings had changed. My opinion is that it takes more time than we think to get the results we are looking for. I need to keep this in mind on future projects.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study is that all of the pupils speak the same native language, so it is possible that the adaptations that worked with my Spanish speaking students may not be as successful with children who speak other languages. A noticeable limitation to the study is the numbers of participants in the research. There were a total of seven EL children in first through third grade who qualified to receive RtI services in reading based on assessment scores. The size of this study makes it difficult to render generalizations about the success of the program. While the participants in the study all qualified for RtI services they were different ages and grades. There were four first-graders, two-second graders and one-third grader. The program is designed for kindergarten through second grade students. However, the trade books used were books
that were leveled at 2.5 to 3.6 from the AR program, so they were still appropriate and challenging which the protocol suggests it should be. Another consideration is that the second and third graders have been exposed to more vocabulary instruction and literacy experiences, so it could be assumed that they would have better gains than the younger students. This did not end up being the case.

There were other factors that may have affected learning: two students were absent due to illness. While I made up the sessions when they returned, the lessons took place at a different time and were done individually. Additionally, I taught these students in three different groups and times of the day: 8:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. In my experience students are more alert and focused in the morning as opposed to the end of the day. Finally, I had the opportunity to teach the same lesson three times each day, with the repeated opportunity to teach, the instruction could change or improve after reflecting on the previously taught lessons.

Future Research

There are many opportunities for future research regarding the effectiveness of Text Talk as a vocabulary teaching method for ELs. Future studies could be conducted that include a larger sample size or with groups of students with diverse language backgrounds. I know many ESL teachers work with students from a variety of language backgrounds at the same time. Future research could also explore whether or not using different adaptations during Text Talk would have similar results to those in my research. For example, would teaching cognates be an effective adaptation for Spanish-speaking students participating in Text Talk lessons?
Other possibilities for future research would be testing the methodology in other content areas, math and science, for instance. Research on the amount of oral language output comparing this program to standard teacher read-aloud discussions would also be valuable to know. One area I would explore is whether this program would work well with special education students. After my research had concluded, I was conducting a read-aloud with a group of second grade EL students. One of the children in the class receives special services for reading. This child was very successful in both vocabulary and comprehension assessments of the lesson because the story was read to him. Also, the focus of the Text Talk curriculum is the use of popular trade books; would it work with textbooks? One could also test whether this format designed for primary students would be effective with older students or adult learners.

Conveying the Results

I plan to share the results of my research with the members of the Title III consortium to which I belong. The eight of us all teach multiple grades of EL students and are the only ESL teachers in each district. The opportunity to learn from one another’s teaching experiences has been valuable to our practices; I believe what I have learned will be useful to them. My PLC members and my colleagues look to me to assist them with ideas and strategies that will aid their instruction and their EL students understanding of the content they teach. I hope that what I have learned may help other teachers improve their practice by adding some of the tested strategies to their vocabulary lessons in order to improve students’ comprehension. I also plan to share the results with the teachers in the neighboring districts for which I provide staff development on the
topic of language learning and supporting ELs in the classroom. I hope my research into Text Talk, as a tool for improving vocabulary and comprehension skills for ELs in RtI groups, will be an impetus for discussions around effective vocabulary lessons that work for all of our students. It is my intent to discuss the findings of the study with my district administration. And, last but not least, the most important group: the students who participated in the study need to know how it impacted them.

Summary

The process of investigating and conducting research has been hard, challenging, work that will impact my teaching for years to come. It is exciting to implement what you have researched and question how to make changes that will further student learning and improve your practice as an educator. I have learned a large amount researching the effectiveness of Text Talk as a language, literacy and vocabulary program, and experienced first hand the positive impact that making adaptations has for ELs. When adaptations to support language learning are made, this program proved a viable tool as an RtI intervention method, and advancing the RtI process for second language students is needed in our district. Since completing my research I have become more purposeful about using strategies to build vocabulary during read-alouds and continue to use Text Talk as an intervention tool. My desire is that I will apply the knowledge that I have gained to my teaching practice and continue to question and seek answers to other areas of my instructional practices and student’s learning.
APPENDIX A

Text Talk Books and Vocabulary Words
# APPENDIX A

*Text Talk Books and Vocabulary Words*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book/Author</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Vocabulary words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dear Juno, Soyung Pak, 1999</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Crisp, gentle, noticed, soared, communicate, eager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Shoes for Silvia Jerry Pinkney, 1993</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Certainly, collected, perhaps, smooth, patience, resourceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Mine, Leo Lionni, 1996</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Bickering, defiantly, desperately, recognized, harmony, selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward the Emu, Sheena Knowles, 1998</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Amusing, detest, gumption, snarled, content, mimic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scarecrow’s Hat, Ken Brown, 2001</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Delighted, grateful, relief, swapped, benefit, trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Pocket for Corduroy, Don Freeman, 1978</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Drowsy, hesitating, insisted, nuzzled, panic, reluctant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Takes A Village, Jane C–Fletcher, 1994</td>
<td>Scholastic</td>
<td>Restless, searching, vendor, wandered, responsible, support</td>
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APPENDIX B

Reflective Journal Document
APPENDIX B

Reflective Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>It’s Mine!</th>
<th>Edward the Emu</th>
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<th>A Pocket for Corduroy</th>
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APPENDIX C

Assessment Tools

Vocabulary Assessment
Character Trait
Timeline of Events
Story Chart
To the teacher: Tell children to listen to the sentences and circle the correct response.
Edward the Emu was...
# Story Chart

**Book Title:**

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I thought this book was [great 😊][okay 😊][not good 😞] because

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APPENDIX D

It’s Mine!
It’s Mine!

a fable by Leo Lionni
APPENDIX E

Edward the Emu
EDWARD
THE
EMU
SHEENA KNOWLES
Illustrated by
ROD CLEMENT
APPENDIX F

The Scarecrow’s Hat
The Scarecrow's Hat
Written and Illustrated by
Ken Brown
APPENDIX G

Caps for Sale
CAPS FOR SALE
A Tale of a Peddler, Some Monkeys and Their Monkey Business

TOLD & ILLUSTRATED BY
Esphyr Slobodkina

SCHOLASTIC
APPENDIX H

_It Takes A Village_
IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Jane Cowen-Fletcher
APPENDIX I

Dear Juno
APPENDIX J

A Pocket For Corduroy
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